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CONTESTED DOMAINS, VERBAL ‘AMPLIFIERS,’ AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN YOUNG ADULthood

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Abstract

We draw on structured and qualitative data to examine relationship dynamics associated with intimate partner violence (IPV) that occurs during the young adult period. Relying on a symbolic interactionist perspective, we identify specific contested domains associated with what has been called ‘situational couple violence,’ and explore the degree to which certain forms of communication about contested areas (‘verbal amplifiers’) exacerbate the risk of violence. Consistent with this relational focus, measures index respondent as well as partner concerns and use of these negative forms of communication. Results of analyses of interview data from a large, diverse sample of young adults show that net of family background, history of antisocial behavior, and other controls, concerns about the partner’s or individual’s own economic viability, disagreements about time spent with friends, and issues of infidelity are significantly related to IPV perpetration. Yet the analyses indicate that infidelity is particularly central as a source of conflict associated with violence, and the use of verbal amplifiers explained additional variance. Further, while research has highlighted important differences in the meaning and consequences of male and female IPV, findings point to some areas of overlap in the relationship concerns and communication processes associated with variations in self-reports of the use of violence. In-depth “relationship history narratives” elicited from a subset of respondents and a sample of their partners support the quantitative results, but also highlight variations within the sample, the sequencing of these interrelated processes, and ways in which gender may have influenced respondents’ perspectives and behavior.

Data from surveys and official sources indicate that intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs with troubling frequency during adolescence and young adulthood. Yet regardless of the age of groups under study, a similar roster of precursors (early exposure to violence within the family, disadvantaged neighborhood) and correlates (antisocial behavior) have been linked to the odds of experiencing IPV (for a recent review of risk factors, see Capaldi et al. 2012). These studies often emphasize social learning processes and the idea of a general propensity for angry expression (Felson and Lane 2010), and in general empirical evidence aligns well with this perspective (Jouriles et al. 2012; Wolf and Foshee 2003). Feminist perspectives have included more attention to uniquely gendered aspects of male-female relationships, and

influential early treatments emphasized the use of violence as a form of control over female partners (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Yet scholars increasingly have highlighted that IPV is not a unitary phenomenon (Johnson and Leone 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart 1994), and thus a focus on the overarching goal of control or dominance may not fully capture the range of relationship dynamics associated with IPV, particularly the type of violence that is often uncovered within the context of community surveys (Johnson 1995).

Even relying on community samples, however, evidence indicates that the use of controlling behaviors is significantly related to IPV (Graham-Kevan and Archer 2009; Stets and Pirog-Good 1990), and numerous studies have shown that anger is a significant correlate (Eckhardt, Samper, and Murphy 2008; Follingstad et al. 1991; Wolf and Foshee 2003). Thus, rather than opposing such dynamics conceptually (i.e., is it about anger or control?), it is potentially useful to move toward integration (see e.g., Bell and Naugle 2008), and explore directly what it is that partners may be attempting to control when they engage in control attempts, and what related “contested domains” are linked to angry emotions and responses that escalate to the point of physical violence. Individual differences (i.e., the idea of a general trait or propensity) are clearly implicated in variations observed in a given sample, but this approach does not shed light on sources of variation across different relationships or at different points in the life course (Capaldi, Shortt, and Crosby 2003; Rennison 2001). The idea of a general need for dominance/control is similarly limited as a basis for understanding these observed patterns of variation, suggesting the need to consider as well more localized, relationship-based sources of risk. A final complication is that even though severe forms of IPV are more likely to be perpetrated by men, population-based studies consistently reveal relatively high rates of female perpetration (Ehrensaft, Moffitt, and Caspi 2004; Gomez 2011). Nevertheless, this phenomenon has not been fully incorporated into existing theorizing.

As a framework for the analyses that follow, we outline a symbolic interactionist (SI) perspective on intimate partner conflicts and identify specific domains (infidelity, socializing with peers, economic issues) that may become sites of conflict during this period of the life course. Further, this perspective emphasizes that certain ways of communicating about these areas of disagreement (we will refer to these as verbal amplifiers) may heighten conflict in specific situations. These verbal amplifiers are likely to be more proximal antecedents of IPV, but often connect back to the contested domains themselves. In this investigation, we focus primarily on relationship dynamics associated with what has been called “situational couple” violence; that is, variations in self-reports of IPV perpetration observed in large community samples of young adults (Johnson and Leone 2005). While this form of violence is relatively more common than severe forms of “intimate terrorism,” these experiences nevertheless may be associated with relationship instability (Halpern-Meekin et al. 2013), declines in mental health (Johnson et al. 2014), as well as physical injury (Whitaker et al. 2007). Our primary objective is to explore general associations between the presence of specific contested domains (the *content* of conflicts), verbal amplifiers (the *form* of conflictual communications) and odds of IPV perpetration. However, as gender has played a key role in prior theorizing about IPV, analyses also explore the degree to which and ways in which gender influences the observed associations.

We rely on a mixed method approach and data derived from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), a longitudinal investigation of the romantic relationship experiences of a diverse sample of respondents interviewed first as adolescents, and subsequently as they have navigated the transition to adulthood (n=928). We include traditional predictors of IPV assessed at the initial wave of interviews (including exposure to parents' use of physical punishment and early antisocial behavior), but focus specific attention on the contested domains and forms of communication (verbal amplifiers) characterizing respondents' relationships with current/most recent partners. This assessment of relationship dynamics and reports of IPV perpetration was elicited at the fifth wave of interviews conducted when respondents averaged 25 years of age. At the time of the fifth interview, we also conducted 152 in-depth qualitative interviews (including 102 interviews of core respondents who had reported IPV and an additional 50 interviews with a corresponding partner) that centered on relationship dynamics associated with discord and violence. These qualitative interviews were useful in the development of our theoretical perspective, and in interpreting the quantitative results.

BACKGROUND

Traditional Violence and Feminist Perspectives

Many investigations of the etiology of IPV have emphasized the key role of early exposure to violence within the family, and research generally documents significant associations between witnessing parental violence, child abuse or other forms of parental coercion, and the later use of violence within a dating or marital relationship (Gomez 2011; Simons, Lin, and Gordon 1998). Foshee and colleagues (2011), in a recent meta-analysis, concluded that child abuse, relative to witnessing marital violence, has a stronger relationship to the individual's own later use of violence in intimate relationships. Yet scholars interested in intergenerational transmission processes have also pointed out that associations, while significant, are often modest, suggesting the need to include attention to the dynamics within specific relationships as a source of further variation in the odds of IPV (see e.g., Stith et al. 2000). A related stream of research focuses on anger, which is generally conceptualized as a learned response tendency or character/personality trait (see e.g., Eckhardt et al. 2008). This approach also suggests an overall stability in the resort to violence that is inconsistent with the results of surveys and official statistics indicating peaks in young adulthood (Rennison 2001) as well as observed differences across relationships (Capaldi et al. 2003; Walker, Bowen, and Brown 2013; Winstok 2013).

Feminist theories have added significantly to this literature by focusing attention on gender dynamics within the intimate relationship context. Early versions of the feminist perspective centered on the idea that IPV is not as much about anger, as about (male) power and control of female partners (Lloyd and Emery 1999). Yet this perspective as initially articulated did not make clear why attempts to control intimate partners and associated violence would be especially elevated during the young adult phase of the life course, or, as with the learning perspective, why IPV was not uniformly observed across different partnerships. In addition, while research has documented that women are more often the victims of severe acts of intimate partner violence, it has been a challenge to interpret the relatively high scores of

women on measures such as the “conflict tactics scale,” when scores are consistently much lower on other self-report instruments tapping delinquency and other forms of antisocial behavior (Anderson 2013; Cui et al. 2013; Straus 2009; Winstok 2013). Thus, our primary objective is to further contextualize these sources of variability by identifying dynamics within relationships that are linked with IPV during young adulthood.

This approach is consistent with more contemporary feminist treatments of the phenomenon of IPV, including those that have developed the idea of typologies (Johnson and Leone 2005). Researchers such as Johnson have highlighted that the intimate terrorist type (IT) represents only one set of dynamics and is not the most commonly occurring pattern. Yet research that has followed in this tradition has often focused on ways to identify the IT form, investigated the heavily gendered nature of this type, and shown that the IT dynamic is more often concentrated in couples located via police, clinic, or shelter samples (Johnson 1995; 2008). Research has also been relatively more specific about some of the dynamics within IT contexts (e.g., noting the presence of different forms of intrusive control such as controlling economic resources, using children, and isolation), and highlighting that these dynamics are actually consistent with portraits developed in the earlier feminist literature (Johnson 2006; Pence and Paymar 1993). Johnson and colleagues have stressed that the ‘situational’ couple type is *not* characterized by these highly intrusive control dynamics, and suggested that this form is not only more common but more gender symmetric (i.e., women may be involved on some level in these conflict situations). Yet discussions of relationship dynamics that do characterize the situational type and distinguish such couples from their non-violent counterparts remain somewhat general. This suggests the utility of adding to this tradition by identifying specific domains of contestation and related communication processes that may be associated with heightened risk.

A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Symbolic interaction theories emphasize the degree to which behavior is necessarily situated, that is, responsive to the immediate situation that individuals confront (Mead 1934). Thus, interaction and communication within the immediate situation are generally critical to the process of establishing meaning(s), and associated lines of action. In the current context, this suggests that dynamics within intimate relationships are potentially important to an understanding of the specific patterning of IPV, recognizing that early family experiences and gender socialization are also formative influences (Felson 2002).

Mead (1934) noted that behaviors that are considered routine or that can be performed relying on previously acquired habits require little thought and occasion little emotion. However, it is in those situations in which actions are ‘blocked’—that is, when the individual cannot move ahead based on these past habits or routines—that thoughts (cognitions) and feelings (emotions) emerge. Recent theorizing about the life stage of emerging adulthood emphasizes that this is a period of transition and flux (Arnett 2004; Settersten and Ray 2010). During this time, young people are in the process of shaping their economic/financial futures, moving away from a heavy focus on socializing with friends to an emphasis on romantic involvement, and in some instances solidifying their levels of commitment to a particular partner (Zimmer-Gembeck 2002). Thus, the period of young

adulthood is surrounded by change and uncertainty in relationships, jobs, and schooling, and new responsibilities, including for some, becoming a parent. Partners may not be on the same timetable or hold the same perspective on these critical issues. Confronting the perspective of the other partner thus may lead to the perception of blocked action, and in turn these arenas may become important ‘domains of contestation’ during this period.

The symbolic interactionist lens and our focus on concrete contested domains add specificity to abstract concepts like anger, control, and power that have been central to previous theorizing about IPV. Thus, while traditional feminist theories have conceptualized violence as arising from a more general desire to dominate and control the partner, here we suggest that control attempts and associated violence often signal either a perceived failure to control the partner’s actions, aspects of the relationship, or to move forward in line with an area that has become a domain of contestation. A focus on these concrete arenas also renders more intuitive recent research documenting that on average men in romantic relationships score higher on “partner control attempts” relative to their female counterparts (Giordano et al. 2012; see also Stets and Pirog-Good 1987).

Our perspective on IPV thus differs from prior theorizing in three key ways. First, we conceptualize control as frequently linked to concrete contested domains rather than as (necessarily) deriving from a general need to dominate the other partner. Second, we include women’s expressed points of view and their own control attempts as a part of the meaning construction process. Third, the focus on ‘blocked action’ provides a basis for incorporating emotions (anger) as well as control processes into the relationship dynamics that eventuate in intimate partner violence (since both emotions and control attempts tend to emerge when actions are believed to be blocked). The latter emphasis represents an integration of social learning and feminist frameworks in highlighting that IPV is about anger as well as about control, and in suggesting that emotions and control dynamics unfold from reality as assessed relationally and in concrete situations. This adds to the view of anger as a personal disposition or trait, and to the notion of control as a product of male gender socialization. Below we briefly highlight three potential domains of conflict, as background for the current investigation of the empirical association between dissatisfactions and discord relating to these domains and risk of IPV during young adulthood.

Contested Domains Associated with Conflict during Young Adulthood

During adolescence, young people may select romantic partners based on relatively superficial considerations, but as they transition to adulthood, partner choices and romantic ties themselves become more meaningful and potentially consequential. Over time, the romantic partner becomes a reflection on the character of one’s own life in ways that friends and even the family of origin do not. Accordingly, individuals may perceive that they cannot achieve important goals without the partner’s cooperation. In line with this changing perspective on their lives and relationships, partners may engage in control attempts designed to affect the other’s attitudes and behaviors with respect to important domains on which there is a perceived mismatch. As partners engage in a process of role-taking (i.e., seeing oneself from the other’s point of view), they may become aware that some aspects of their role performances are lacking—from the other’s point of view (Miller 1981). Similarly,

the individual does not relish being the potential change agent/controller, but wants to see changes relating to the domain of contestation nevertheless. Recent studies of the young adult phase of the life course suggest potential areas that may become important sites of conflict during this period of transition and change (Settersten and Ray 2010). In the current study, we focus on three such domains, recognizing that this is not an exhaustive roster.

Economic Realities/Concerns about the Future

A key developmental task associated with the transition to adulthood is to gain independence from the resources/supports previously provided by parents (Arnett 2004). As scholars focusing on the period of young adulthood have highlighted, the process of ‘making it’ (Osgood et al. 2007) may be delayed, circuitous, or out of reach for some who are navigating this transition. Because young people are still in the process of developing their economic and social positions, they may become increasingly preoccupied with their own progress (or lack of it) as well as that of their romantic partners. This contrasts with the teen years, when economic and career concerns were abstract and somewhat at a distance (Edin and Nelson 2013; MacLeod 2008). Concerns about economic issues may become increasingly pressing during this period, as romantic relationships come to include coresidence and the presence of children. Thus, dissatisfactions regarding the partner’s or one’s own financial prospects may become a source of personal sensitivity and potential discord.

Within the contemporary context, the notion of fundamentally gendered life-course aspirations is an oversimplification of how men and women may be positioned with respect to economic issues (i.e., the idea that women’s primary emphasis is upon relationships, and men’s revolves around achieving financial success). Increasingly, women’s labor force participation is considered integral to establishing independence and a solid footing for family life (Cha 2010; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). Thus, men and women alike will generally have a keen interest in their own as well as their partners’ economic prospects. Nevertheless, given the legacies of traditional gender socialization, a lack of firm economic footing and negative attributions about one’s financial viability may be a source of particular concern and sensitivity for young men. This is consistent with Carlsson’s (2013) recent analyses of shifts over the life course in norms about what it means “to be a man” at different stages of life. As Carlsson notes, most of the prior research on the idea of ‘doing masculinity’ focuses on themes (independence, aggressiveness) that resonate with young men’s lives (Messerschmidt 2000); yet norms and expectations shift, reflecting that in the transition to adulthood the ability to be a provider becomes increasingly salient as a core aspect of men’s identities.

The Peers-Partner Balance

Research clearly documents a peak in adolescence in peer influence and in the importance of socializing with friends (Brown and Larson 2009). In research on adult populations, however, the emphasis shifts to a consideration of the nature and impact of marital unions (Sampson and Laub 1993). Yet these social network patterns are complicated by demographic trends, including a later age at first marriage in the contemporary context (Silva 2012). The young adult period is thus characterized by relative freedom from parental

scrutiny that may be associated with additional opportunities for peer socializing as well as involvement with romantic partners. This suggests possibilities for time with peers to become another potential domain of contestation with particular relevance to this phase of the life course.

Time spent with peers may have meaning beyond the time element, as it may be associated with a lack of attention to career/academic/economic concerns (see above), greater involvement in risky behaviors such as drug or alcohol use, and increased opportunities for infidelity or finding another partner (the third domain of contestation we describe in more detail below). Even more fundamentally, the choice to spend significant amounts of time with peers potentially reflects a lack of full commitment to the romantic relationship itself. Prior theorizing about social networks and IPV has emphasized the tendency of the abusive (male) partner to try and isolate the female victim from their friends and family (Pence and Paymar 1993). Although this is an important dynamic, focusing specifically on the young adult period suggests the need to consider that young women may also seek to restrict what they view as excessive socializing on the part of their male partners. The base rates of young men's involvement in risky behaviors such as drinking, drug use, or other forms of criminal behavior generally exceed those of young women of a similar age (e.g., Bachman et al. 1997; Gault-Sherman 2013). Thus, it is intuitive to expect that conflict within young adult relationships may stem not only from young men's interests in controlling their female partners' interactions and whereabouts, but from women's concerns about their partners' excessive peer socializing, and all that may be connected to it.

Issues of Fidelity and Commitment

Prior research relying on both adolescent and adult samples has shown an association between jealousy and IPV (Hettrich and O'Leary 2007; Murphy et al. 2005). However, we expect that issues of fidelity and commitment may represent a particularly important contested domain and source of discord during young adulthood. Relationships formed during this time often lack either the ephemeral quality of teen relationships or the legal and social weight of marriage bonds. Research indicates that young adults on average begin to form longer duration relationships relative to their teen counterparts, and consider the romantic partner an increasingly important source of support and influence (Giordano et al. 2012). At the same time, studies show that breakups, a pattern of relationship churning (i.e., breaking up and getting back together), non-relationship sex ('hook-ups') and infidelity are relatively common experiences (Ford, Sohn, and Lepkowski 2002; Halpern-Meekin et al. 2013; Manning, Giordano, and Longmore 2006), suggesting that fidelity concerns may not always be unwarranted.

Studies find that such experiences are reported by both women and men during this age period, but generally reveal that young men tend to report higher rates of non-relationship sexual experience and concordance (simultaneous involvement in multiple relationships) relative to reports of young women of comparable ages (Lyons et al. 2013). Thus, while the IPV literature has tended to emphasize men's jealousy as a warning sign of an abusive relationship, women's concerns about fidelity and commitment may also be associated with relationship discord. For example, Miller and White (2003), in an important qualitative

study, explored young women's experiences within their romantic relationships, and found that issues of jealousy and partner cheating were frequent preoccupations that in some instances were related to young women's use of violence. Similarly, in a recent analysis of taped conversations between 17 incarcerated men arrested for domestic violence and their partners, Nemeth and colleagues (2012) found that infidelity was a significant theme in discussions about events leading up to their committing offenses. We follow up these qualitative studies with a systematic quantitative assessment of the association between reports about respondent and partner infidelity/infidelity concerns and the odds of perpetrating IPV.

Communication Processes: The Role of Verbal Amplifiers

The above discussion places emphasis on the *content* of communications between partners, as we identified specific domains of contestation that may be associated with control attempts and negative emotions during this phase of the life course. Yet even in the presence of disagreements relating to these areas, violence is generally not a routine, everyday occurrence. This suggests the need to consider as well the *form* of communications within the intimate context. Extended disagreement related to these key domains of contestation, especially around issues of fidelity and commitment, may devolve into negative terrain, including name-calling or ridicule, communication tactics that may be more proximal antecedents of the resort to violence (Athens 2005). Prior research has shown that verbal conflict is a robust predictor of IPV, but here we focus on communication tactics that are perceived as heightening feelings of disrespect or humiliation (Felson 2002).

The use of these verbal amplifiers may be occasioned either by an accumulation of perceived disappointments/concerns or by an 'outsized' incident (e.g., discovery of a partner's infidelity) that places particular contested domains in bold relief. Family background experiences and personality differences may be related to the use of such verbal tactics, but here we wish to emphasize that such provocative communications may derive from relationship-specific dynamics—perceived failure to control the partner's actions in relation to these key contested areas, negative reactions to control attempts, and eventually to the negative appraisals explicit in names that are called and the ridicule that is communicated. Thus, violence occurs not only because of disappointments with partners in these areas (i.e., the notion of blame as 'externalized'), but as a last ditch effort to refute these (incoming) negative attributions.

Current Study

Our objective in the current analysis is to further localize intimate partner conflicts, as we consider specific contested domains associated with IPV during the young adult period. Recognizing the fundamentally dyadic character of intimate relationships, we include conceptual and measurement attention to women's as well as men's concerns related to these domains. We focus on a current or most recent relationship, and respondents' reports about their own and partner concerns relating to the domains of career/finances, time spent with peers, and infidelity. Analyses also consider the use of verbal amplifiers (their own and partner use) as factors associated with variations in self-reports of IPV perpetration. Models include controls for traditional predictors (e.g., coercive parenting, juvenile delinquency),

sociodemographic characteristics, adult status markers (e.g., presence of children, marital and employment status), and more basic features of the romantic relationship (e.g., its duration). Next we assess the degree to which gender influences the association between these contested domains, communication dynamics, and self-reports about IPV perpetration. Subsequently we consider how our focus variables combine (e.g., high levels of contested domains along with the use of verbal amplifiers) as influences on variations in self-reported IPV. Finally, we draw on in-depth “relationship history narratives” elicited from a subset of the respondents to illustrate the role of contested domains and verbal amplifiers in specific conflict situations that escalated to the point of violence. These longer narratives provide a more nuanced perspective on the sequencing and interrelationship of these processes, and how men and women may be situated somewhat differently with respect to these areas of concern and contestation.

DATA AND METHODS

This research draws on data from the TARS, which is based on a stratified random sample of 1,321 adolescents and their parents/guardians who lived in a large metropolitan area in northwest Ohio (Lucas County). The TARS data were collected in the years 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2011. The analyses rely on structured interviews conducted at the first (2001) and fifth (2011) interviews, and a parent questionnaire administered at the first interview provided information about sociodemographic characteristics and parenting practices. The sampling frame of the TARS study encompassed 62 schools across seven school districts, but school attendance was not a requirement for inclusion in the study. Most interviews took place in respondents’ homes. The stratified, random sample includes over-samples of black and Hispanic adolescents. The initial sample included 1,321 respondents and wave 5 retained 1,021 valid respondents, or 77 percent of wave 1. Attrition analyses are described in supplemental materials (Supplement 1).

The analytic sample includes all those who participated in the fifth interview, but individuals who were not identified as black, white, or Hispanic were excluded ($n=23$), as were those respondents who did not report about a current or most recent relationship (i.e., those reporting no dating or relationship experience) ($n=70$). The final analytic sample thus consists of 928 respondents (422 males, 506 females). The qualitative sample includes 102 core respondents who reported violence either at the fourth or fifth interview. An additional 50 partners of these respondents were also interviewed, which resulted in a sample of 100 interviews that permitted a couple-level perspective.¹

Measures

Dependent Variables—*Relationship violence perpetration* is measured at the time of the fifth interview and is based on responses to twelve items from the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus et al. 1996) ($\alpha=0.91$).² We also estimate models relying on a weighted scale that took into account frequency and severity, and results are similar. The

¹For a more detailed description of procedures, see supplement 1.

²The indices of contested domains and verbal amplifiers were also assessed at wave 5 in order to ensure that the relationship described is the same as that referenced in the IPV reports.

analyses to follow focus on variations in reported perpetration rather than victimization, as our interest is in the ways in which individuals' feelings of dissatisfaction and understandings about particular domains of contestation may be associated with their own behavior within the relationship. Nevertheless, prior research has shown that victimization and perpetration are highly correlated. Thus, variations on the perpetration scale will necessarily capture significant numbers of respondents with victimization experience. We also estimated models relying on a dependent variable that indexed the presence of "any violence" within the relationship (including perpetration and/or victimization), and results are similar.

Key Independent Variables—Contested Domains. *Partner's poor financial prospects* is measured using four items ($\alpha=.72$) asking respondents how much they agree with the following statements: (1) "X's financial future is bright" (reverse coded), (2) "X doesn't know what he/she wants as far as his/her job/future," (3) "I wish X had a better job," and (4) "I like the way that X handles money" (reverse coded) ($\alpha=.72$). Parallel items assess *respondent's poor financial prospects* ($\alpha=.55$). We use two measures tapping the *peer-partner balance*: Partner has admonished respondent about time with peers ("Does X tell you not to spend so much time with your friends?") and an item focused on respondent's concerns about the partner ("X puts his/her friends before me"). *Partner infidelity* is based on five items asking about infidelity in general and as a source of disagreement: "he/she cheated on me" and "I thought he/she might cheat on me," "threatened to have an affair with someone else," "has seen another girl/guy," and "has gotten physically involved with other girls/guys" ($\alpha=.86$). *Respondent infidelity* contains similarly worded items ($\alpha=.78$). A summary index of contested domains was also constructed by creating indicators to signal above mean values on each of the individual contested domains, and taking their sum. One standard deviation above the mean on this summary index constituted high contested domains.

Partner's and respondent's use of verbal 'amplifiers' ($\alpha=.78$, $\alpha=.78$) were based on items assessing whether the following had ever occurred in their relationship with X: "He/she was disrespectful to me," "He/she mocked me," "I got upset that he/she was talking about our problems in front of people," "He/she called me rude names during an argument," and "He/she didn't let me finish saying what I have to say." Parallel items index respondent use of these negative forms of communication. A total verbal amplification score was also constructed by taking the sum of partner and respondent use of verbal 'amplifiers,' with high scores constituting values at least one standard deviation above the mean.

Sociodemographic Variables, Adult Status Characteristics and Basic Relationship Indices—We include a series of sociodemographic indicators: *gender*, *age*, *race/ethnicity* including non-Hispanic white (contrast category), non-Hispanic black, and Hispanic, *family structure* including two biological parents (contrast category), step-family, single-parent family, and any "other" family type, and *socioeconomic status* as measured by the highest level of education reported in the parent questionnaire. *Coercive parenting* is measured using a six-item scale ($\alpha=.82$) similar to the CTS2, but referencing the parent's behavior toward the child.

Respondent delinquency is measured at wave 1 ($\alpha=.81$) using a ten-item version of Elliott and Ageton's (1980) self-report instrument. Adult status characteristics include dummy indicators of employment at wave 5 (*full-time*, *part-time*, and *unemployed* (contrast category)), and status as a *parent* is determined by a question asking whether the respondent has any children.

We include a series of basic relationship variables in the models. Three dummy indicators distinguish whether the relationship of interest is *dating* (contrast category), *cohabiting*, or *married*. Additionally, a dummy variable is used to denote whether responses reference a *current relationship* or their most recent romantic relationship (1=current). Relationship *duration* is measured in years by asking how long respondents have/had been with their current or most recent partners. The range is from about a month (.08) to 14 years.

Results

Supplementary Table 1B presents descriptive statistics for the sample as a whole and by IPV status. Approximately 16 percent of the sample reports IPV perpetration. Table 1 presents results of a logistic regression analysis examining the association between specific contested domains, the use of verbal amplifiers, and odds of reporting IPV perpetration in the current/most recent romantic relationship. As results indicate, at the zero order, all of the indices of contested domains (dissatisfaction with partner's financial prospects, respondents' own poor financial prospects, admonishment from partner to spend less time with friends, the view that partner 'puts friends first,' as well as partner and respondent infidelity) are associated with significantly higher odds of IPV perpetration. Further, reports of the use of what we have labeled verbal amplifiers by both respondent and partner are associated with elevated odds. Several of the factors introduced as controls also share a significant relationship to IPV. Gender (female) is positively related to self-reports of perpetration, as is minority status (black, Hispanic) and delinquency. Non-traditional family forms (single parent or 'other') and mother's education were significant predictors, and both part-time and full-time employment are associated with reduced odds of IPV. Conversely, parenthood is associated with greater odds, as is involvement in a cohabiting relationship. Finally, duration of the relationship is positively linked to IPV reports.

Models 2, 3, and 4 examine each pair of contested domains (referencing partner and respondent concerns) along with controls for sociodemographic and family background, early antisocial behavior, adult status and relationship characteristics. Results show that net of this set of covariates, concerns with financial future (both indices) and both infidelity measures are significant. As indicated in Model 3, of the two measures of concerns about involvement with friends, only the individual's report of partner admonishments to spend less time with friends remains a significant predictor of IPV perpetration. Model 5 introduces the two measures of the use of "verbal amplifiers" of conflict, and results show that net of covariates, higher levels of both partner and respondent use of these amplifiers are significantly associated with increased odds of IPV perpetration. A final model includes all of the focal variables and controls. In this model, the two forms of infidelity are significant, and both respondent and partner's use of verbal amplifiers are also significantly associated with perpetration. The model also shows that when all of the other factors are

taken into account, “partner puts friends first” is associated with lower odds of IPV perpetration. In this full model, of the other covariates, gender (female), respondent delinquency, and employment status remain significant correlates.

Supplemental models estimate interactions of each of the contested domains, the two indices of verbal amplification and gender. None of these interactions are significant, indicating a generally similar influence across gender in the patterning of reports about these areas of disagreement, the use of verbal amplifiers, and variations in the odds of reporting IPV perpetration. This does not suggest gender symmetry in the experience of IPV, but does indicate some areas of overlap in relationship and communication dynamics associated with variations in male and female self-reports of perpetration.

As an additional step in exploring issues of gender, we recoded the variables to reflect male and female-focused contested domains and male/female use of verbal amplifiers.³ These results should be interpreted cautiously, as they combine reports (i.e., reports about women consist of reports provided by female respondents as well as men’s reports referencing their female partners). These results are shown in Supplement 2 (Table 2A), and are generally similar to the respondent-based analyses. However, in the full model that includes verbal amplifiers, only male infidelity and female partner use of amplifiers are significant.

One of the challenges of examining relationship dynamics of this type is that these negative features may be interrelated. This is particularly the case for the verbal amplification indices. Thus, while only women’s use of verbal amplifiers is significant in the above model, male and female verbal amplification scales are highly correlated (.89), suggesting that these are often reciprocal and intimately related processes.⁴ As a further illustration of the effect of clusters of relationship dynamics, results in Table 2 show first that a summary index that takes into account the respondent’s total score on the various forms of contestation is significantly associated with IPV perpetration, net of covariates. The total ‘verbal amplification’ score is also significantly related to the odds of perpetration. Next, Table 3 examines categories reflecting varying combinations of contested domains and use of verbal amplifiers. Table 3 shows that the combination of high levels of verbal amplifiers and high scores on contested domains is associated with the greatest odds (24.788) of reporting IPV, net of traditional covariates. However, other combinations are also associated with elevated odds of IPV. That is, high scores on contested domains without the use of verbal amplifiers (4.256), and the use of verbal amplifiers itself (9.701), even absent high scores on the contested areas we assessed, are associated with greater odds of IPV relative to respondents in low contested domain and low verbal amplifier relationships. Nevertheless, the high-high combination was associated with greater odds relative to these other categories (results not shown). As a final step, we estimated interactions of contested domains and verbal amplifiers (including each contested domain assessed separately as well as relying on the summary indices). None of these interactions are significant, suggesting that the effects of

³We restrict this model to male-female relationships.

⁴To address the possibility of multicollinearity issues, we examined the VIF’s for all the variables included in the study. The VIF’s range from 1.07–6.07. Those indexing the various contested domains are less than 2, suggesting that multicollinearity is likely not a significant issue for those scales in particular (e.g., DeMaris 2004 suggested that VIF’s of about 10 or higher indicate collinearity problems). Higher VIF’s were observed for the two indices of verbal amplifiers, but these are within the acceptable range (5.98; 6.07).

the contested domains are not conditioned on level of verbal amplification.⁵ Results are more consistent with the idea of an additive effect. These are all challenges within young adult relationships that may result in conflict and negative forms of communication. And as the findings indicate, individuals who report high levels of contested domains and frequent use of these verbal amplifiers are at extremely high risk of experiencing IPV within the relationship.

A Qualitative Lens on Contested Domains and Verbal Amplifiers

We focus the discussion below around processes described above that have not figured prominently in many prior theoretical discussions and programmatic efforts. Yet it is important to underscore that many of the dynamics emphasized in classic treatments (e.g., the presence of male jealousy and controlling behaviors; severe consequences stemming from male violence) also receive ample support within these narrative accounts. For example, a 24 year old respondent, Jill, described a terrifying incident in which her partner confronted her about another man's attentions after a party, and refused to allow her to leave the room. The incident that unfolded included throwing Jill across the room and dragging her back inside when she attempted to escape. Similarly, Kaitlyn, age 27, told the interviewer that a former partner who was extremely jealous gave her a black eye because she was "12 minutes instead of 10 minutes going to pick up pizza for everybody."

Another respondent's narrative also focused on fidelity concerns, but in this instance Lori indicated that violence occurred after her suspicions about her partner Jeremy had been confirmed. Here we see evidence of a role for actual (male partner) infidelity in combination with negative communications (the notion of verbal amplification) that relate directly to these concerns:

And I think he was just so, so upset that he was caught in every single lie. I was just tellin' him how much of a liar he was and how could you do this to somebody that you've been with for so long, just calling him sorry and you know, and I told him, "You'll never be your dad." Because his mom is a deadbeat mom [who] ran out on him and his brothers and his dad raised him. And I just told him, you, you're your mom. You know? Like that, that's who you are. And you know, you, you're nothing. But he was upset about it because he despises his mother... I think he hit me first. And then after that I just kinda blanked out and I just started swinging, pickin' up stuff, hittin' him. And it was just kinda like you know I felt relief because I was hurtin' him, but then I felt bad because my kids were there... [Lori, 26]

As elaborated in our theoretical discussion, emotions emerge from the perception of blocked action. Lori's anger appears to be related to her inability to control her partner Jeremy's cheating, and in turn the character of a relationship that had developed over 'so long' a period of time. Consistent with our notion of verbal amplification, Lori declares that Jeremy is 'a liar,' 'sorry,' and 'nothing,' and further offers that he is 'his mom.' In context, this

⁵Results of the logistic regression model using the summary index of contested domains and the combined measure of verbal amplifiers yielded an estimate of -0.02 for the cross-product term of contested domains x verbal amplifiers ($p=0.37$).

involves an even more negative attribution, as Jeremy's mother early on had left the family, and is someone he "despises."

This example illustrates that Lori's use of violence is directly related to issues of infidelity. Yet although Lori is the partner who may be considered 'righteously' indignant (Katz 1988), Jeremy nevertheless lashed out first. His actions (carrying on an affair with impunity) have also been blocked, and in the moment he is unable to stop the flow of negative "reflected appraisals" that Lori has provided him. Thus, Jeremy's use of aggression appears to occur as a defense against being presented with this negative portrait, rather than based on a more general desire to control Lori's whereabouts and movements (as suggested in traditional theoretical treatments that more often evoke the 'intimate terrorist' dynamic, and that are exemplified by Jill and Kaitlyn's narratives, as quoted above). Jeremy's actions can also be considered an attempt to control, but here the interest is immediate, and apparently focused on the flow of these negative attributions. Further, Lori's aggressive acts occurred after Jeremy first hit her, but her own account suggests that motivations are not limited to concerns about self-protection (I felt relief because I was hurtin' him...), as traditional treatments of women's perpetration have often emphasized (e.g., Dobash and Dobash 1998). In short, while Lori and Jeremy act on the basis of somewhat distinct meanings or 'definitions of the situation,' both would concur that Jeremy's infidelity is at the center of this altercation.

A similar pattern is evident in 27 year old Amanda's description of a tumultuous relationship with David, which was characterized by his frequent infidelity. In this incident, Amanda struck her partner first:

He don't want to face all the stuff that he did, he would leave. You're not about to leave and leave me wondering like why you did this...and yea I went down to his house and we really fought...He was calling me out my name and I'm calling him out his name. I think I hit him in his face or something. I kind of feel bad...And that's what I think made him mad because I hit him in his face and he swung on me back and after I hit him he tried to hit me [he knocked her to the ground], I tried to go for him again and that's when his sister jumped in the middle.

We note also that while the couple level interviews we conducted revealed that each partner necessarily held a unique perspective, there appeared to be relatively high levels of agreement regarding the specific domains that were being contested. As an example, Jeff, a 28 year old core respondent, suggested that "every time I leave [she thinks] I'm cheating on her or something," and admitted to the interviewer that eventually he did go on to cheat. This is similar to his 32 year old partner Allison's own description elicited during an interview that took place some six weeks later: "the conflict was him and his little ho's as I like to call them."

The examples above show a significant role for infidelity as a key domain of contestation, and the presence of communications that in concrete situations may increase anger and escalate the conflict. Yet results shown in Table 2 also indicate that cheating may be linked to violence even absent the use of these types of verbal amplifiers. Thus, consistent with these results, a number of respondents indicated that they or partners moved relatively

quickly between beliefs or discoveries about infidelity to an act of perpetration, without apparent escalation due to these verbal insults:

I was in the shower and she was going through my phone, so I hop out the shower and I think the woman called and she's like, "who is this woman" and smacked, and just swung at me. Smacked me right here in the face. Like whack, like that! [Thomas, 26]

She thought I was cheatin on her...cooked me a nice meal, then we go to sleep and, boom, she's like, "Get up, get up mother fucker!" She smacks me, "Get up!" I wake up and you know I'm looking at a pistol...Pfft, I just begged her. [Will, 27]

Male jealousy also figures into these conflict and violence narratives, as previous research has emphasized. However, some narratives show that while the violence is misguided and harmful, the partner's concerns may not be completely apocryphal. Again, it is reasonable to expect that some women involved in what have evolved as unhealthy, conflictual relationships may eventually begin to seek an alternative to the current partner. This observation is consistent with a supplemental analysis in which we relied only on female respondents' reports about their own infidelity within the context of the current/most recent relationship. These reports should be less biased than male reports about the partner, and less subjective than items indexing cheating concerns or threats to cheat. Results of this more straightforward analysis indicate that women's reports about their own infidelity (as men's) are significantly related to IPV risk (results shown in Supplement 2, Tables 2B and 2C).

In line with this quantitative result, 25 year old Dan describes an incident in which he went over to his girlfriend Crystal's house and saw her on the couch with another man. The two began to argue, but almost immediately he began to engage in actions that were aggressive. Dan eventually restrained Crystal by putting her in a headlock, but attempted to mitigate the seriousness of his response by referring to it as a "calm down, you in the wrong, you swinging at me and you the one that got somebody over here" headlock:

Sit and listen. Like, don't get up. Like we sit here we talk about this. You know what I mean? Like I just walked in and you got some fool just laying on the couch. She sit there talking about "this is my house" and "don't be putting your hands on me..." The third time [he pushed her back onto the couch] she got up swinging. That's when, you know, she bust my nose...

It is also important to note that in spite of his indignation about his partner's behavior, this respondent had self-reported cheating on partners across all five waves of the structured interviews.

Indeed, further examination of the base rates of infidelity observed across the sample serves to further situate women's and men's experiences around issues of infidelity within their relationships. As described above, interactions of infidelity by gender were not significant. This indicates that the presence of infidelity or infidelity concerns has a similar relationship to the likelihood of IPV, regardless of gender. Nevertheless, across the sample as a whole, where cheating had occurred within a relationship, in 82 percent of the instances this

included cheating on the part of the male partner.⁶ Certainly, women's reports about infidelity are not rare within the data (55% of respondents indicating some infidelity within the relationship reported female infidelity), but a large share of this includes instances where both partners appeared to have cheated. Viewed another way, of situations involving any infidelity, female partner-only infidelity occurred in only 18 percent of cases, as contrasted with 42 percent that involved male-only infidelity. Such distributions provide additional support for prior qualitative research (e.g., Miller and White 2003) that has identified male infidelity as a significant source of discord within relationships. Taken together, these qualitative and quantitative results highlight that while men's unwarranted jealousy has been a key component of traditional descriptions of relationship dynamics associated with IPV, women's warranted concerns as well as reciprocally related patterns of infidelity appear to be significant dynamics within many young adult relationships that escalated to the point of physical violence.

The Role of Other Contested Domains: Economic Issues and Time Spent with Friends

While infidelity is thus a "bottom line" concern and source of conflict for many of these young adult respondents, domains of contestation such as economic issues or time spent with friends play a supporting role that may come to the foreground in specific situations.⁷ For example, Felicia, age 28, had recently been fired from her job at a convenience store, and recounted conflicts that related to a lack of economic and practical contributions on the part of her partner Darrell ("you don't do nothing here, you don't pay no bills, you don't help me do nothing, you don't take care of the kids"). Yet after additional follow-up questions Felicia indicated that most heated arguments related to his cheating ("Most of the time it was him taking off and being sneaky with females"). Further complicating the portrait, Felicia admitted that at times she introduced the idea of seeing other men ("Well don't talk to me... Don't ask me where I'm going. Don't ask who I'm talking to. It's none of your business... And then he'd get mad at me and we'd get into an argument over that.").

The idea that the domains we investigated may cluster is well illustrated by 27 year old James' account, which succinctly describes discord related to all three contested domains examined in the quantitative analyses. Again, however, his comments make clear that infidelity concerns are a central preoccupation:

Me going out with my friends. Me not calling her like as much I should. Uh, money...stuff like that. Yea, like she wanted me to check in or something. Like, I'm not, I don't have to check in with you. Wanted to know like every move that I made...Oh, the insecurities are kind of my fault because I did cheat on her when we first started dating, but she also cheated on me too, so....and then she didn't believe that I could be faithful after we resolved our issues in the beginning.⁸

⁶We examined reports about partner and respondent cheating, and coded these responses as reflecting male partner only, female partner only or cheating on the part of both members of the couple. This yields an imperfect estimate, as some partners may attribute behavior to the partner that did not occur, or may be unaware of infidelity that had actually taken place.

⁷These domains are not inexorably linked, however. For example, in 58% of the cases where individuals scored high on concerns about partner's finances/economic prospects, the respondent did not score similarly high on fidelity concerns. Yet of those reporting higher levels of concerns about infidelity, 65% also scored above the mean on economic concerns.

Concern about time with peers is also a frequent topic in the narratives of many respondents, and appeared for some to be an ongoing source of disagreements. Yet the specific accounts of these concerns further reinforce the notion that these attempts to control the partner's time and whereabouts often connect back to relationship insecurities and fidelity concerns:

Like she wants to control everything. She don't want me to go hang with my friends, my boys or whatever. She wants me to sit at home and be with her all the time and I can't ever go nowhere by myself. When I say that I need some me time, she'll be like, "What do you need me time for?" She don't want me to talk to nobody...and when I'm asleep she's going through my phone and through my pockets and you know all that type of stuff. [Ben, 26].

As suggested at the outset, the transition from a style of socializing that involves peers to a more predominant focus on one's romantic partner and a more settled lifestyle may be less than seamless. Based on prior research on gender differences in parental supervision during the adolescent period, it is also possible that the scrutiny of female partners presents an unwanted contrast with the relative freedom that characterized many young men's teen years. As one respondent told the interviewer, "my momma don't even ask me questions like that." References within several women's narratives suggest that this attempt to control partners' actions and whereabouts is a dynamic they recognize: As Jen put it, "I control my relationships...to a t. I literally control everything he does. I'm a real heavy control freak in my relationships. I watch everything he does. I go everywhere with him. I don't, I don't let him go alone."

A further complication is that the in-depth interviews make clear that the partner's control attempts do not inevitably connect to violence. Thus, some young men's accounts include gratitude that a partner has steered them away from negative influences, resulting in better lifestyle choices (Laub and Sampson 2003). However, when an individual is not ready to make those relationship or lifestyle changes, such control efforts can develop as a source of discord. And to the degree that partners believe that time with friends may be associated with infidelity and acts of defiance occur, conflict may escalate, as suggested in the example below:

Because he left, he dropped me off and took off. It wasn't just that he left with his friends, but there were also girls in the car. There was a bunch of girls and all kinds of stuff in the car. I'm just like, why would you have left and left me at home? That upsetted the crap outta me. When he got home, I met him out there and we were arguing back and forth and he just wanted to be left alone and I kept on—that's bullshit, screamin' at him. And he pushed me and I was like oh hell no. [Beth, 23]

Verbal Amplification as a Stand-Alone Precipitant

The quantitative and qualitative data support our emphasis on specific contested domains likely to be associated with discord and in some instances violence during the young adult

⁸Recall that the scale we used in the quantitative analyses includes items indexing infidelity concerns as well as 'actual' infidelity. Although the findings are significant when relying on the more limited measure, it is potentially useful to consider the broader constellation of concerns, as these provide a more comprehensive picture of partners' preoccupations and perspectives about the nature of the relationship.

period. In the above examples, infidelity, time with friends and economic issues may be key domains of contestation, and incidents often feature an element of verbal amplification. Yet another subgroup of respondents described violent incidents where the negative communication processes themselves appeared central (see also Table 2), and the contested domains were only obliquely referenced. For example, the individuals quoted below detail denigrating or belittling comments from a partner that they link directly to a violent response:

I would be like, we need to do this for our relationship and he would just like mock me and just be like, ehnnahnahnah, like that, and it would just annoy me so bad that I...I felt like I couldn't do anything but, but hit him to get my point across.
[Chelsea, 24]

I was gonna go over my friend's house. She took like the pictures she had of us on the wall, threw those all on the ground, threw those everywhere, which I was like 'you're stupid' because those are your frames [laughs]...She did smack me, like twice. [Kyle, 23]

I was basically telling her that she was psychotic and I don't think she liked that very much. I mean it escalated really really quickly and I was really taken aback by her reaction. [Tom, 27]

Yea...I broke his jaw...he had to go to the hospital...and he's like "you're fuckin stupid, you're a stupid bitch, why don't you let your sister defend her fuckin self... you and your sister are ho's..." I think the reason he was talkin about my sister is because he wanted her...he cheated on me with my own cousin... [Kelly, 26]

These excerpts are face-valid as provocative communications that would likely increase the recipient's feelings of anger. Here the contested domains play a background role within the narrative account (e.g., "I was gonna go over my friend's house...", "he wanted my sister") and the element of contestation is the strong reaction against the negative attribution that has just been offered. A provisional hypothesis in this regard is that some attributions respondents describe may be perceived as particularly aversive to the degree that they center on demeaning gender stereotypes (you're a stupid bitch, you're psychotic). Accordingly, some examples within the narratives suggest that young men appeared to be particularly sensitive to negative statements that reflected on their lack of progress in succeeding along traditional economic lines. Thus, verbal amplifiers may connect back to the contested domains we centered on, as when Jamie called his partner a 'ho' or these respondents focus on their partner's lack of economic viability:

I call him a freaking bum...you have nothing. You're a nobody. [Allison, 27]

Now she want to call me a deadbeat, and say I ain't this and I ain't that. [Mark, 28]

I told him [the young man she had slept with] had a bigger ____ and a better job.
[Lisa, 25]

These negative reflected appraisals contain references to the partner's lack of economic progress, but in many instances events that precipitated the name calling and negative emotions often centered on fidelity and commitment concerns. Such verbal amplifiers are

age and life-course-specific attributions that are likely to have greater felt impact as individuals have matured into adulthood (i.e., most 14 year olds are not yet in a position to be considered a deadbeat). Similarly, while even teens may experience anger when a partner has denigrated their relationship concerns (“we need to do this for our relationship...”) young adults may have invested more heavily and for a longer period of time in particular relationships, may share biological children, and also have accumulated prior failure experiences that they do not wish to repeat in the current relationship. These complex biographies within and across relationships thus are part of what each individual carries forward into a particular conflict situation. In short, during young adulthood, these issues are often not completely settled, and the stakes are believed to be higher.

CONCLUSION

Prior research has documented that anger and control are related to IPV, yet surprisingly few studies have investigated specific contested domains associated with angry emotions or what it is that individuals may be attempting to control about their relationship or their partner. Drawing on a symbolic interactionist framework, our objective has been to further situate IPV within the period of young adulthood, and to examine concrete contested domains associated with intimate partner conflict during this phase of the life course. We identified three potential areas of conflict: economic issues, dissatisfaction regarding time spent with friends, and infidelity concerns. Such domains are not inherently linked to the young adult period, but likely reflect that the transition from adolescence to adulthood brings increased pressure to reorganize one’s characteristic patterns of socializing, achieve economic independence, and solidify one’s relationship with a single romantic partner.

Consistent with the interactionist perspective we outlined, measures indexed respondent as well as partner concerns, and models further highlight a role for communication processes—our notion of verbal amplification. Although we found support for considering each of these domains, concerns about infidelity appeared to be particularly salient, as both respondent and partner infidelity and related concerns were significantly associated with IPV, net of other contested domains and a roster of sociodemographic and other covariates. Generally corroborating these results, infidelity also emerged as a key theme in the respondents’ own narrative accounts of the conflicts they had experienced. Findings suggested further that engaging in forms of verbal amplification contributed additional variance to IPV risk, and that the use of these negative verbal tactics was often, but not inevitably, associated with issues of infidelity. Finally, supplemental analyses showed that the combination of high levels of contested domains and frequent use of verbal amplifiers was strongly linked to reported IPV perpetration.

The current examination of relationship dynamics is consistent with the view that IPV has an interpersonal or dyadic component (see e.g., McHugh and Frieze 2006; Winstok 2013), however, this does not lead us to conclude that young women’s perspectives are identical to those of their male counterparts nor that consequences of male and female violence are similar (i.e., the notion of sexual symmetry). Thus, a gendered lens remains important to an understanding of the character of these young adult intimate partner conflicts. Our findings support the focus of prior theorizing and programmatic efforts on men’s jealousy and

controlling behaviors as important relationship risk factors. Yet results also suggest that this emphasis is not comprehensive as a portrait of all of the relationship dynamics that may be associated with IPV.

Prior research has shown that men on average report higher levels of partner control attempts, and the current study adds further context to these findings by exploring specific areas around which women's control attempts often revolve. Studies have shown that men are more likely to report infidelity, and during adolescence and early adulthood often gain social currency as they accrue sexual partners/experience (Giordano et al. 2009). However, women have historically been subject to greater social censure for sexually permissive behavior, and, during this phase of the life course in particular may have a stronger interest in solidifying a committed relationship. Within the confines of the relationship itself, then, women are likely to view their partner's infidelity as a serious violation of trust, not as a source of status-enhancement. Men's socialization may in turn foster not only a tendency to control aspects of the partner's behavior, as previously emphasized, but resentment about the partner's attempts to control their own patterns of socializing and other aspects of their behavior. These relationship experiences represent a challenge to earlier understandings about preferred ways of 'doing masculinity,' which had included a premium on independence, sexual conquests and the like (Carlsson 2013). This is consistent with Mead's assertion that emotional reactions occur when individuals cannot proceed smoothly ahead based on past taken-for-granted repertoires. Women may also perceive that their own lives and relationship aspirations are 'blocked' by virtue of the partner's actions and these areas of mismatch. Thus, it is intuitive to expect that women as well as their male counterparts may experience negative emotions that may be associated with verbal conflict and in some instances IPV.

These findings suggest the need to include attention in programmatic efforts to a full range of relationship dynamics that may be implicated in IPV experiences, and in particular to highlight the role of infidelity as a key source of discord during this period. In some instances, it may be more useful to conceptualize control attempts as indicative of perceived relationship vulnerabilities rather than reflecting a straightforward assertion of male privilege or dominance. Recognizing that there are some areas of overlap in women's and men's concerns and attempts to control/change their partners could serve to increase receptivity to other messages that identify some of the gendered aspects of these relationship dynamics, as well as differences in outcomes associated with IPV (i.e., greater fear, intimidation, potential for injury).

Given the strong associations between our indices of verbal amplifiers and odds of reporting IPV, the role of communication dynamics in conflict escalation should be explored in more detail in future research and incorporated into programmatic efforts. Previous research has shown that verbal conflict is a robust predictor of IPV; the current study contributes by showing that some types of communication may be especially provocative as they connect to the contested domains we focused on in this investigation. And, while interactions of the verbal amplification index and gender were not significant (reflecting a similar impact of use/experience of these communications on self-reported IPV), these negative communication strategies may well be characterized by gendered *content*. For example,

negative attributions about men's financial prospects, and labels that denigrate women by implying that they are sexually promiscuous, may have distinct meanings and effects.

Additional research is needed on the sequencing of these and other relationship and communication processes as they unfold across the life of a given relationship, and as these may vary for different age groups. While both men and women may engage in control processes within their relationships, over time men who perceive a lack of control over female partners, and/or, resent female partners' attempts to control them, may draw on violence as a control strategy, as previous scholars have suggested. As Cairns (1979) noted, "violence works," if only in a precarious and temporary fashion (see also Felson 2002). Accordingly, men's size and more extensive socialization in the use of violence may combine to quickly upend what may have been an earlier pattern that included women's control efforts, use of verbal amplifiers, and willingness to contest what they believe are important issues within their relationships. Longitudinal analyses, particularly those that include more frequent assessments (e.g., diary methods), will be useful in establishing the temporal order of these interrelated dynamics, and also in documenting how overall patterns can shift over time. It is also important to explore ways in which factors emphasized by social learning theorists influence the presence of and reactions to particular contested domains. For example, an early pattern of delinquency involvement may not only influence IPV risk directly (as emphasized in previous research), but indirectly through a greater likelihood of involvement in concurrent relationships, frequent socializing with peers, limited economic prospects, and willingness to resort to negative forms of communication with one's intimate partners. Dispositional differences may also condition reactions to key sources of conflict such as infidelity. For example, individuals with low emotional reactivity may be more likely to leave the scene or develop a plan to break up with the partner.

Limitations of the current study include the regional nature of the sample, and our reliance on respondents' reports about the partner's actions. Yet symbolic interactionist theories stress the importance of the actor's own perspective and subjective understandings (Thomas 1924). Thus, if a respondent is not aware of a partner's infidelity, this could negatively affect the relationship, but is not likely to be the source of specific conflicts. Further, the couple level interviews we conducted suggested that while differing in viewpoints, both members of the couple tended to reference the same generally contested areas, particularly when infidelity had been an issue. Nevertheless, additional quantitative studies incorporating couple-level data could contribute to an understanding of distinct ways in which men and women understand and react to various areas of mismatch and potential conflict. Another limitation of the study is that the design does not include oversamples of select groups (women in housing for victims of violence, men arrested and/or incarcerated for IPV). Accordingly, our results may not generalize to the most serious IPV cases. The in-depth narratives included references to some serious levels of violence (e.g., use of knives, guns, references to injuries), but samples that include a larger number of such cases are needed to allow for meaningful comparisons. Additional studies that include common measurement across these targeted samples and population-based surveys could, along with longitudinal approaches, provide additional insight about variability in the character of relationship dynamics associated with IPV.

Even if additional research documents significant differences in relationship contexts for more severe forms of IPV, the findings of the current study have significant implications. Because 'situational couple violence' occurs at a relatively high rate of prevalence, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood, it is likely that broad-based prevention efforts will reach individuals whose relationship circumstances accord with some of the dynamics described in the current study. Thus, interrupting these negative relationship dynamics before they become chronic/firmly entrenched should be a high priority. Even within the context of community samples, IPV has been linked to a range of negative outcomes which, along with IPV itself, compromise individual well-being, the stability of families, and have the potential for detrimental effects on the next generation of children growing up in such conflictual family circumstances.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Table 1

Odds Ratios for the Association between Contested Domains, Verbal Amplifiers, and Reports of IPV Perpetration (n=928)

	Zero Order	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>Contested Domains</i>						
<i>Financial/Economic Concerns</i>						
R's poor financial prospects	1.155***	1.113**				1.065
Partner's poor prospects	1.152***	1.127***				1.019
<i>Peer-Partner Balance</i>						
Partner admonishes r re peers	1.590***		1.469***			1.108
Partner puts friends first	1.320***		1.176			0.767*
<i>Infidelity Concerns</i>						
R's infidelity/concerns	2.643***			1.909***		1.516*
Partner's infidelity/concerns	2.696***			2.046***		1.775***
<i>Verbal Amplifiers</i>						
R's use of verbal amplifiers	2.043***				1.470**	1.453*
Partner's use of verbal amplifiers	2.058***				1.573**	1.385*
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>						
<i>Gender</i>						
(Male)						
Female	1.638**	1.634*	1.985**	1.648*	1.886**	2.059**
Age	0.966	0.921	0.930	0.921	0.905	0.905
<i>Race</i>						
(White)						
Black	2.186***	1.351	1.245	0.857	1.172	0.855
Hispanic	1.915*	1.077	0.979	1.181	0.905	1.077
<i>Family Factors</i>						
Parental coercion	1.025	1.024	1.032	1.038	1.003	1.010
Family structure						
(Two biological parents)						

	Zero Order	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Single parent	2.833***	1.887*	1.873*	1.560	1.784*	1.386
Step-parent	1.683	1.053	1.095	0.835	0.866	0.579
Other	2.867***	1.551	1.599	1.867	1.686	1.578
Mother's education						
Less than HS	1.807*	1.222	1.052	0.934	1.744	1.562
(HS)						
Some college	1.013	1.005	0.996	0.896	1.098	0.992
College or more	0.465**	0.671	0.700	0.659	0.745	0.797
<i>Delinquency</i>						
Respondent delinquency	1.512**	1.552**	1.633**	1.568**	1.698**	1.578**
<i>Adult Status Characteristics</i>						
Employment Status						
Part-time	0.519**	0.549*	0.563*	0.452**	0.409**	0.349**
Full-time	0.297***	0.389***	0.391***	0.335***	0.328***	0.329***
(Unemployed)						
Parent						
(No)						
Yes	1.521***	1.165	1.169	1.062	1.152	1.051
<i>Relationship Characteristics</i>						
Relationship status						
(Dating)						
Married	1.306	1.230	1.291	1.454	0.757	0.964
Cohabiting	1.848**	1.782*	1.827*	1.895*	1.275	1.393
Current relationship	0.993	1.015	0.987	1.288	0.824	1.167
(Most recent relationship)						
Duration	1.090**	1.107*	1.078	1.076	0.963	0.984
Model χ^2		131.18***	123.77***	194.46***	247.30***	286.96***

*
p < .05;**
p < .01;

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Table 2

Odds Ratios for the Association between an Index of Contested Domains, Verbal Amplifiers, and Reports of IPV Perpetration (n=928)^a

<i>Contested Domains</i>	1.399***
<i>Verbal Amplifiers</i>	1.454***
Model χ^2	263.54***

*
p < .05;

**
p < .01;

p < .001

^aModel includes controls for sociodemographic characteristics, family factors, delinquency, adult status characteristics, and relationship characteristics

Table 3

Odds Ratios for the Association between Specific Combinations of Contested Domains and Verbal Amplifiers and Reports of IPV Perpetration (n=928)^a

Contested domains (high); use of verbal amplifiers (high)	24.788 ***
Contested domains (high); use of verbal amplifiers (low)	4.256 ***
Contested domains (low); use of verbal amplifiers (high)	9.701 ***
(Contested domains (low); use of verbal amplifiers (low))	
Model χ^2	226.51 ***

*
p < .05;

**
p < .01;

p < .001

^aModel includes controls for sociodemographic characteristics, family factors, delinquency, adult status characteristics, and relationship characteristics